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SENSIBILITY, SINCERITY, AND SELF-INTEREST IN CHARLOTTE SMITH'S ETHELINDE

This essay argues that Charlotte Smith's little studied novel, "Ethelinde", presents sensibility in a way which complicates the opposition between virtuous and corrupt femininity. In this text, Smith breaks down the association of sincerity of feeling with virtue by showing how authentic emotions could be managed for self-interested purposes. Sensibility in "Ethelinde", therefore, exceeds the logic of sentimentality. I historicize this self-interested function of feeling in relation to the work of Gillian Skinner and Harriet Guest, who argue that the emergence of political economy inflected discourses of feminine feeling with the language of commerce. At the same time, I demonstrate that Smith's mobilization of sensibility represents a proto-feminist intervention into the patriarchal order, participating in the ideological agenda that Diane Hoeveler has identified in women's gothic literature. Smith's presentation of feeling as a possible mode of agency for women is, however, deeply conflicted, and I suggest this might be due to the author's real-life battles with patriarchal law. In order to theorise the ambiguous status of sensibility in the text, I engage with Arlie Hoschild's twentieth-century theory of emotion, which allows an articulation feeling in terms that move beyond the familiar constructions of feminine virtue and vice.

Keywords: Charlotte Smith; Sensibility; Gothic; Ethelinde; Romantic; Eighteenth Century

Kaley Kramer notes "a widespread cultural consensus" in the long eighteenth century which held that inner emotional experience was revealed transparently and inadvertently through the body,¹ and which created a conception of virtuous femininity associated with spontaneously expressed emotion (sensibility). At the same time, however, writers voiced concerns that "gestures 'natural' to virtuous women could be mimicked...by those without virtue in order to take advantage of the noble efforts inspired by a performance of virtue-in-distress".² Sympathetic feelings for others could be equally double-edged. Ildiko Csengei draws attention to writers who presented sympathy as self-interested, directed only at those who could further the feeling subjects own interests.³ Equally, however, "the excess of disinterested feeling was seen as threatening to the integrity of self and society",⁴ since feelings for another could operate "impulsively and irrespective of who their object really is".⁵ Sympathy could therefore be both overly selfish and overly altruistic.

Charlotte Smith's interventions into the discourses of feeling in the Romantic period have been remarked upon several critics.⁶ Most relevant to present discussion is the work of Claire Knowles and Sarah M. Zimmerman, who highlight the blend of sincere and staged emotions apparent in Smith's sonnets.⁷ This essay turns the attention to Smith's early novel *Ethelinde* (1789), to demonstrate how the staging of sensibility structures the logic of social relationships in the text, raising questions about the nature of emotions, about sincerity and manipulation, and about gender.

Drawing on the work of Harriet Guest and Gillian Skinner, I argue that sensibility in Smith's novel both conforms to and exceeds its culturally defined parameters. Sensibility in

Ethelinde ostensibly validates feminised conceptions of virtuous feeling and yet also disrupts these conventions through its representation of exploitative and profiteering strategies of feeling. Further, I argue that the contradictions in Smith's presentation of sensibility can be productively located in the tradition of female-authored gothic literature theorised by Diane Long Hoeveler. When considered in relation to Hoeveler's thesis, the ambiguities in Smith's presentation of gendered feeling can be seen as semi-covertly disrupting patriarchal authority. This is achieved by presenting women's sensibility and passivity as, paradoxically, a proactive social force which moulds men and reality to suit female needs. This move towards women's empowerment, however, is deeply conflicted: it offers a form of female agency that resists male authority, but it remains extremely sceptical about the desirability of the strategies it suggests.

To pursue these two lines of argument, I draw on Arlie Hochschild's twentieth-century study of emotional labour in *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling*.⁸ Putatively a critique of how capitalism exploits the emotional resources of service workers, most thoroughly examined in relation to U.S. air hostesses in the 1970s and 80s, Hochschild's research also offers a useful theoretical framework with which to interrogate strategies of feeling in *Ethelinde*. This is because Hochschild's theory adds nuance to the familiar language of repressed emotions, enabling greater insight into the different feeling strategies of the text's characters, particularly regarding the differences in feeling between the text's eponymous heroine and her cousin-in-law and male guardian, Sir Edward Newenden. Both these characters are associated with virtuous sensibility inasmuch as their feeling is not simulated and operates on appropriate objects but, I argue, their modes of feeling actually have important aspects in common with corrupt sensibility which cannot be fully articulated in terms familiar to the sentimental tradition.

Key to Hochschild's argument is the notion that emotions are not straightforward responses to external stimuli, but rather a process over which the feeling subject has considerable control: we might think of a person who *tries* to enjoy a social event they would rather not attend, for example, and who is so successful that they do actually enjoy themselves. Hochschild labels this as "direct prod deep acting", which means to actively attempt to summon or repress an emotion for social purposes. In Smith's novel, I argue that direct prod deep acting is the method of emotional management which most strongly characterises Sir Edward. In contrast, *Ethelinde* does not so much repress or summon emotions as she does manipulate social encounters so that her spontaneous emotional response is seen in the most productive light. In both the cases of Sir Edward and *Ethelinde*, the feelings they experience are real rather than simulated, and it is this which marks them as virtuous within the logic of sentimentality and sensibility, and yet I aim to show that Smith submits this concept of virtuous emotion to a sustained critique.

Both Skinner and Guest highlight that during the latter half of the eighteenth century the construction of femininity became embroiled with political economy, since both women's apparently superior sensibility and commerce were seen to civilise the manners of men. Because of this, the discourses of sensibility and femininity became unstable and ambiguous, frequently traced, whether consciously or unconsciously, by the logic of exchange.⁹ Hochschild's work allows for a productive engagement with these ideas, as well as those of Hoeveler. For Hochschild, peoples' actions in the social economy are regulated by their sense of what is owed between people. From the simple repayment of a kind word with a smile, to the complex systems of felt obligations and returns generated by the mode of production, all interaction within the social economy is embedded in an understanding of credit and debt. Credit and debt for its part can exist in both material and psychological form. One may repay a friend for his or her concern over a problem (emotional credit being granted) with a gift of jewellery (material debt repayment).

Hoschild, however, does not conceive of the social economy purely in terms of mutual benefits. For example, where there is inequality of status between people, “it becomes acceptable to both parties for the bottom dog to contribute more” (84) to the relationship in the form of greater value gifts. Because Hoschild’s thought allows for inequality in emotional exchange, it is differentiated from sentimental relationships conceived in terms “of a mutual obligation which is equally pleasurable on both sides” (Skinner 131). Through this, Hoschild’s theory allows for an elaboration of sensibility in *Ethelinde* which emphasises social profiteering rather than disinterested benevolence, and which is in some ways better articulated in the language of commerce than of sentimentality, and suggestive of an amalgamation of discourses of between feeling and political economy.

At the same time, Hoschild’s social economy converges with Hoeveler’s analysis in its emphasis on credit and debt. Hoeveler argues that for women in the female-authored gothic/sentimental tradition “suffering (particularly if one is young and pretty) can become a kind of lucre to be exchanged in the strange barter system that women understood (or misunderstood) as the ‘shadow labor’ of gendered capitalism”.¹⁰ Through Hoschild’s social economy, I show that sensibility operates along similar lines as suffering does in Hoeveler’s analysis. More precisely, sensibility in *Ethelinde* can be sold for a profit, realised in terms of male financial and social support. It is in this that Smith’s novel works-out a possible mode of agency for women through feeling and within patriarchy, and it is here that the ambiguous status of sensibility identified by Skinner and Guest aligns with the strategies characteristic of the gothic heroine.

To go further, it is necessary to outline the plot of *Ethelinde*. Ethelinde is left orphaned and indigent after her father dies of acute anxiety brought on by financial ruin.¹¹ Because Montgomery, her love-interest, is also poor, Ethelinde refuses to marry him until the couple secure the means of (genteel) subsistence. The story of Ethelinde is in one sense the story of her social management in enabling a prudent marriage to Montgomery.¹² To do this, Ethelinde requires the support – financial and social – of her wealthy and socially connected cousin-in-law, Sir Edward Newenden.

Sir Edward, although married to Ethelinde’s cousin, Lady Newenden, is deeply in love with Ethelinde. Ethelinde firmly denies this to be the case until very late in the story, and although the text makes plain Sir Edward’s feelings, Ethelinde is frequently presented by the narrator as being ignorant of Sir Edward’s desires.¹³ Nevertheless, sustained evidence to the contrary convinces the reader otherwise. The libertine Lord Danesforte thinks Ethelinde is “not insensible” of Sir Edward’s “partiality” (29). Similarly, exasperated by Sir Edward’s inappropriate behaviour towards Ethelinde, Lady Newenden flirts with Danesforte by way of revenge, and when confronted by Sir Edward publicly proclaims that Sir Edward’s accusations are only “to hide his own odious and infamous partiality” to Ethelinde (159). As the story progresses, Sir Edward becomes increasingly indiscrete, drawing the suspicions of not only Lord Danesforte and Lady Newenden, but also of Lady Newenden’s parents, Montgomery, and polite society at large. Finally, in a rare few moments the narrator tacitly admits that Ethelinde is aware of the romantic significance of Sir Edward’s behaviour, such as when Ethelinde’s “heart told her” (292) that Sir Edward saw her “with too much partiality” (292). At other times, Ethelinde’s innocence is discredited more generally, such as when the narrator states that she is “incapable of artifice” (319) only to almost immediately explain her plan to secretly have a copy of a miniature portrait of herself made, so that both Sir Edward and Montgomery may possess a picture of her, while also making each believe that only they have been honoured with the romantically freighted gift.

Kramer points out that the heroine of sensibility is unable “to detect personal danger, particularly sexual threats. She must be...unable to dissimulate, but equally unable to distinguish lies from truth. Paradoxically, the heroine of sensibility must be ignorant of the

skills in which she shows the most proficiency”.¹⁴ *Ethelinde*, I am arguing, complicates the paradigm. The heroine combines genuine sincerity of feeling with self-conscious manipulation through feeling. For much of the text, her sensibility conforms precisely to the virtuous understandings of the concept outlined earlier, as well as aligns her with the generic conventions of the heroine of sensibility. And yet at times her feeling exceeds the category of feminine virtue in ways which often cannot be accounted for by the discourses of sensibility and sympathy prevalent in the period.

Early in the story, the rich libertine-in-training Davenant proposes to Ethelinde. At the time, Ethelinde’s father and brother are absent, and as such she is lacking in the traditional channels of male protection. Instead, she turns to Sir Edward to reject Davenant for her. Sir Edward, however, has not yet fully understood the danger posed by Davenant, incorrectly believing that he will turn out to be reasonably virtuous. As such, Sir Edward is ambivalent about Ethelinde’s instant refusal of Davenant’s offer of marriage, and tries to persuade her to consider the matter a little more, and to speak to him herself:

“There is another person, however, whom you ought to see: Davenant has repeated his wish to be allowed to speak to you”.

“Dear Sir Edward”, answered Ethelinde with increased quickness, “how can you be so importunate about that young man! Indeed I can never like him; I can never esteem him; why then should him a moment to be in doubt about my sentiments?”

“Then why not hear and dismiss him, if to dismiss him you are determined?”. (81)

By keeping the proposal in the hands of Sir Edward Ethelinde maintains a level of male protection. Talking to Davenant herself could expose her to gossip, charges of coquetry, or be construed by Davenant as encouragement. Even so, there is a sense in this passage that Ethelinde is unfair to Sir Edward. In the first instance, she had previously promised Sir Edward she would speak to Davenant herself, but instead continues to position him as the middle-man in the affair. Sir Edward, in fact, feels deeply uncomfortable in the situation, telling Davenant it “is a commission which you know I did not wish to undertake. It will be fitter for you to speak to her yourself” (70). Moreover, Ethelinde’s response seems to exceed proper feminine virtue. Her “increased quickness” and the following tirade of speech gesture towards excess rather than delicacy, denoting spontaneous wilfulness and exasperation at the possibility of not getting her own way. Maintaining both the male protection authorised by late eighteenth century society as well as appropriate feminine behaviour here seems impossible.

Ethelinde’s immediately following response to the scene described above is illuminating:

“Dear Sir Edward, press me no more on this subject; and forgive – forgive the ungrateful petulance with which I have received your friendly but impracticable advice”. She then gave him her hand; while her eyes, filled with tears, were fixed on his face. He found himself too much affected; and not daring to trust his own resolutions, he only kissed her hand, and said, with as much steadiness as he could command – “You will always command me, Ethelinde; you know that I have no wish but to see you happy”. (81)

Here Ethelinde acknowledges the “petulance” of her previous statement and humbly asks for forgiveness, yet her apology does far more than merely excuse a social slip. The image here presents “emotion in tableau” (Todd 4), characteristic of the novel of sensibility. The novel of sensibility stops the story to display “physical manifestations of tears and trembling”, which are believed to elicit similar responses in the reader, and “justified by the belief that a heightened sense of one’s virtue through pity for another is morally improving (Todd 8).

Ethelinde’s sensibility therefore works on the assumption that such a display of feeling generates powerful emotional responses in others. And, at least for Sir Edward, this is what occurs. The realisation of Ethelinde’s sensibility here is sufficient to ensure that Sir Edward continues to protect her from the unwanted attentions of Davenant, his previous misgivings seemingly forgotten along with the petulance of Ethelinde’s behaviour. Moreover, in stating that he has no wish but to make Ethelinde happy, Sir Edward alludes to the excessive financial and social support he will provide the heroine for the rest of the story, to the detriment of his wife’s well-being, his marriage, and his own emotional health (as I demonstrate later).

Considered thus, the scene cannot be adequately understood by the codes of sentimentality. The expression of sensibility here does not create shared and mutually beneficial solidarity; it rather stacks emotional, social, and financial resources in favour of the heroine. Because of this, I think the scene can be more productively articulated according to Hoschild’s social economy. Hoschild argues that social situations are regulated by “feeling rules”; that is, unwritten rules which require us to feel in certain ways in specific situations. For example, we are expected to feel sadness at a funeral. But feeling rules do not only apply to ceremonial events such as funerals. In fact, they apply to all social intercourse. When Ethelinde responds with “increasing quickness” (81) she breaks the feeling rule, since she is expected to feel greater gratitude to Sir Edward, and more awareness of how he might be feeling, than she does. Seen thus, Ethelinde has put herself in Sir Edward’s debt according to the logic of exchange through which Hoschild understands the social economy. It is precisely Ethelinde’s sensibility, however, which allows her to not only repay the debt, but actually position herself as the creditor in the relationship. Through the spontaneous remorse expressed both in her words and through her body, with interest added in the form of the sensuous kiss of the hands, Ethelinde settles her account and puts an unspoken demand on Sir Edward, which he can only pay-off through his continued socio-economic support. Sensibility in this scene is more about individual profiteering than it is about shared support.

At the same time, however, because the scene aligns Ethelinde with the expectations of the heroine of sensibility it codes her on a generic level as virtuous. Twenty-first century readers are unlikely to experience the potent emotional response expected from such scenes by many long eighteenth century theorists, authors, and readers, but we can certainly recognise the tableau operating according to these assumptions. As such, the imagined Romantic-period reader is subjected to an assault on his or her feelings which parallels the one experienced by Sir Edward, and which encourages the reader, along with Sir Edward, to overlook any transgression of feminine propriety apparent in Ethelinde’s behaviour. In this sequence, therefore, the putative conformity to the logic of sensibility conceals the heroine’s transgression of this very logic.

Furthermore, even when the logic of social profiteering which underwrites sensibility in this episode is acknowledged, the feelings of Ethelinde cannot be easily aligned with the negative or corrupt determinations of feeling identified by Kramer or Csengei. As the natural expression of her genuine feelings of shame, it is opposed to the simulation of emotions by scheming women eager to exploit male chivalry. Directed at Sir Edward, it is representative of sympathetic feelings towards an appropriate male guardian. Sensibility in this instance

exceeds its cultural categorisations. It is both sincere and appropriately feminine, and yet caught-up with ideas of individualistic self-interest.

Consider another example. After having met Montgomery and his mother, Ethelinde wishes to further their interests through Sir Edward. Suspicious and jealous of Ethelinde's feelings for Montgomery, Sir Edward questions Ethelinde in the hope of gaining information. This is how the experiment plays out:

Ethelinde then, unable to resist the pleasure of talking of Montgomery and his mother, and secretly flattering herself that she should create a friend for them in the noble-minded and generous Sir Edward, related, in as few words as she could, the outline of their history...[and] the vivacity with which she spoke, the animation of her countenance, and the warmth of her expressions, convinced Sir Edward, who watched her narrowly, that the young man had made an impression on her heart...The pang this conviction gave to his own, he immediately endeavoured to suppress; and yielding to his natural generosity, he became really interested for the mother and the son.
(69)

Speaking about Montgomery activates Ethelinde's genuine feelings for him, which are apparent to Sir Edward because of "the vivacity with which she spoke, the animation of her countenance, and the warmth of her expressions" (69). Her emotions are therefore expressed naturally through the body in line with the culturally valorised experience of sensibility. There is no reason to believe that Ethelinde's feelings are simulated here. After all, her romantic and platonic love for Montgomery and his mother, respectively, forms the main drive of the story, and is insisted upon time and time again. Moreover, Smith creates several textual foils which are narrated to show the insincerity of their emotions (Lady Newenden, Clarinthia Ludford, Lady Belle), and these characters function precisely to highlight the sincerity of Ethelinde's own emotions.

And yet once again the heroine's apparent alignment with virtuous sensibility becomes ambiguous. The narrator in this passage informs the reader that Ethelinde secretly flattered "herself that she should create a friend" (69) for Montgomery and his mother "in the noble-minded and generous Sir Edward" (69), adding an element of strategic self-interest to the spontaneous experience of emotion. Ethelinde's feeling here is both sincere and guided by hidden, ulterior motives; at once conforming to a virtuous conception of sensibility while simultaneously subverting the ideal of disinterested feeling which creates the moral bonds of sentimentality.

Moreover, sympathy in this episode, as well as sensibility, seems to emphasise self-interest more than it does spontaneous benevolence. In particular, it aligns in important ways with the thought of Adam Smith. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith argues sympathy for another "does not arise so much" from the knowledge of misfortune or suffering itself "as from that of the situation which excites it".¹⁵ That is, it is less the actual suffering of a person which excites sympathy and more the knowledge of the particular circumstances which led to their suffering, an argument seemingly borne out in the text by the activation of Sir Edward's sympathetic feelings for Montgomery only after Ethelinde conveys his particular story. Similarly, for Adam Smith sympathy occurs through the "imaginary spectator", a function of mind which allows the individual to put him or herself in the position of another (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*). Because of this, and as Todd points out, sympathy in Adam Smith is seen "less as a spontaneous than as a contrived mode" (27), and as such is at odds with the ideal of spontaneous feeling which constitutes the sentimental

narrative. Adam Smith's line of thought squares quite firmly with the manner in which Sir Edward does not immediately experience sympathy for Montgomery, but rather achieves benevolent feelings through an emotional process in which he must "supress" his jealousy and "yield to his natural generosity".

This mode of sympathy is ultimately selfish, both in Adam Smith's philosophy and in Charlotte Smith's novel. In terms of the former, Chris Jones notes that sympathy, for Adam Smith, is based not on disinterested benevolence but rather on the individual's need to feel loved (30). That is, through sympathetic feelings people are able to satisfy their innate desire to feel loved by others, thereby coding sympathy as, at heart, a selfish human function. As Skinner argues, Adam Smith's later and more influential *The Wealth of Nations* enacts a "gradual honing down of 'sympathy' until the quality becomes almost indistinguishable from middle-class self-interest" (13). By the time of the publication of *Ethelinde*, then, sympathy in Adam Smith's work had become almost entirely structured through rational selfishness.

This notion of selfish feeling is also apparent in Sir Edward's feelings for Ethelinde. Because Sir Edward is married, and because he is too virtuous to "entertain any other designs" (41); that is, to consider having an affair with Ethelinde, the only outlet for his desire is in supporting Ethelinde. The reader is told that "in her [Ethelinde's] absence his [Sir Edward's] thoughts dwelt perpetually on the means of making her happy" (94); and even more explicitly, Sir Edward, "deprived of almost all other happiness, found his greatest consolation in contributing to the ease and relief of Ethelinde" (97). Seen as such, Sir Edward's will to aid Montgomery and his mother, the painful sensations he experiences notwithstanding, represent, in the final analysis, a selfish need to satisfy his romantic and sexual desire, sublimated into the sentimental narrative of male protection. The logic of emotional exchange between Ethelinde and Sir Edward is predicated, therefore, as much on self-interest and rational feeling as it is on the spontaneous expression of emotion also inherent in Ethelinde's bodily expression of sensibility.

Todd argues that "throughout the 1780s and 1790s...Clear sentimentalists degrade sentiment, and sentimental novelists claim not to be writing sentimental novels" (144), resulting in "decidedly schizophrenic" (144) texts which seem at once to endorse and refute sensibility. The apparent contradictory nature of sensibility in *Ethelinde* certainly aligns with this shift in attitudes towards the traditions of sentimentality and sensibility. Similarly, Guest's and Skinner's arguments concerning the links between political economy and feminine sensibility go some way to explaining the contamination of sensibility with the logic of exchange in *Ethelinde*. Guest argues that "for women to think of themselves as modern subjects" means acknowledging their "desires are structured and articulated as those of commercial agents and political citizens" (312). Because the language of sensibility is associated with domestic femininity on the one hand, and yet also implicated in commercial discourse on the other, it provides women with the means of creating modern subjectivities in a way apparently congruent with feminine virtue. It is this, I think, which allows Smith to articulate the social profiteering of Ethelinde through the terminology of sensibility. Smith's aim in doing this, I think, is to express deep resentment about patriarchy, and about what an indigent woman must do to survive. Before exploring this in detail, I would like to briefly turn to the specific historical situation of Charlotte Smith herself, since this appears to have focussed the contradictions in *Ethelinde* and made them particularly self-conscious of their apparent ambiguities. In relation to this, Sarah Zimmerman's understanding of the mixing of "self-consciousness with sincerity" in Smith's sonnets is revealing.¹⁶

Zimmerman argues that the sonnets employ rhetorical strategies which emphasise the sincerity of the poet's suffering while at the same time presenting these sufferings in a manner best suited to elicit both reader sympathy and active charity. Through this, "Smith discovered that she could only act indirectly", stimulating practical aid without explicitly

asking for it.¹⁷ Indeed, this strategy was so successful that “Readers, including patrons and critics, were often glad to act for her, and Smith received generous assistance from publishers..., and from various patrons throughout her career”.¹⁸

Ethelinde’s emotional strategies, I would argue, operate along similar lines to Smith’s management of her publicly available sensibility. By sublimating the active search for practical assistance into feminine sensibility, Ethelinde maximises the socio-financial rewards she can expect. Just as with Smith’s critics and publishers, Sir Edward is persuaded to offer more than mere sympathy: he spends money and exerts his social influence to aid Ethelinde, her family, and Montgomery. Just as Smith was able to self-consciously present her feeling to secure practical assistance, so too is her heroine Ethelinde. It is because of this the real-world context, I think, that the ambiguities in *Ethelinde* appear to be to some degree contrived, rather than as the pure result of aesthetic devices concealing ideological functions. Jacqueline Labbe, in her analysis of Smith’s *The Old Manor House* argues that “the novel enacts its own dependence on and departures from cultural mores and norms, it acquires the ‘meta’ style of writing, aware of its own status as text”.¹⁹ In *Ethelinde*, we see this process in relation to the discourse of sensibility. This self-awareness of the ambivalence of sensibility is apparent throughout the text, and comes through, for example, in the direct acknowledgment by the narrator that Ethelinde self-consciously seeks to manipulate Sir Edward into aiding Montgomery and his mother in the passage analysed above. Similarly, the earlier cited episode in which Ethelinde secretly has a copy of her picture made, so that both Montgomery and Sir Edward may possess a likeness, while each believing only they have been favoured with the romantically-charged gift, also draws attention to the possible duplicity in apparently disinterested emotion.

I previously stated that sensibility in *Ethelinde* represents a deep cynicism about patriarchy, and this can be understood in relation to what Hoeveler has labelled the “professionalization or cultivated pose of femininity” (14) in women’s gothic novels. *Ethelinde* is not a gothic novel in the conventional sense (it does not feature much in the way of hidden passages or haunted apartments), yet Smith’s presentation of how Ethelinde transforms the world around her, primarily through her emotional resources, does work in much the same way as Hoeveler theorises. For Hoeveler, women in these novels must learn to temper the perceived excesses of their femininity: “Possessing the mind of a man means that women are first and foremost reasonable, calm, and easily able to control or better yet repress their emotions” (32). Similarly, men must undergo a parallel curbing of the destructive masculine tendencies of “violent, aggressive, lustful, and adulterous” (31) behaviour, thereby becoming “feminised”. For the heroines, the control of dangerous impulses signals their suitability for inclusion in an emerging bourgeoisie culture of self-command. For the men, “a man who has been professionally gendered...according to bourgeoisie ideology, will not think he can tyrannize over his wife and children” (32), thus guaranteeing security for the heroine in the patriarchal system.

The heroine of female-authored gothic or sentimental texts brings about this idealised order not by passively submitting to men, but by understanding “not to trust to the goodwill of men but to manipulate or control those men – weakened by their own emotions – without those men actually being aware of it” (Hoeveler 33). This seems to resonate strongly with Ethelinde’s handling of Sir Edward in both the examples previously discussed. In the first example, Ethelinde influences Sir Edward to help her, to offer her his male protection, by simply expressing her sensibility, which results in the overcoming of Sir Edward’s own tightly-wrought feelings. In the second example, it is the jealous Sir Edward that sets-out to manipulate Ethelinde, reasoning (correctly) that his questions will provide insight into Ethelinde’s feelings for Montgomery. But the game turns sour as Ethelinde’s expression of sensibility leads only to Sir Edward endeavouring to aid Montgomery and, by extension, to

help enable Ethelinde's marriage to Montgomery. In both examples, Ethelinde enlists male support without seemingly doing much at all, exemplifying what Hoeveler calls "'wise passiveness', or what we might more accurately recognize as a form of passive-aggression" (7).

I think, however, that the articulation of sensibility in *Ethelinde* adds nuance to Hoeveler's argument. The mark of the professionally gendered woman, according to Hoeveler, is the ability to "to control or better yet repress their emotions" (32), but *Ethelinde* complicates this idea by separating the control of emotions from the carefully managed staging of sensibility, questioning the former and valorising the latter. In the second episode analysed in detail above, the "pang" of jealousy Sir Edward feels towards Montgomery "he immediately *endeavoured* to suppress" (69, my italics). To repress an emotion is an act of emotional labour which, we recall, Hoschild identifies as "direct prod deep acting". Unlike Ethelinde, who does not try to feel a certain way but rather naturally achieves the socially appropriate emotional response, Sir Edward's emotional management requires that he actively battle himself to obtain the desired feeling. While Hoschild acknowledges that direct prod deep acts are common in everyday life and sometimes successful, they imply a level of inauthenticity inasmuch as the subject may experience their emotions as forced or controlled: "In deep acting my conscious mental work... keeps the feeling I conjure from being part of 'myself'" (36). In both the cases of Ethelinde and Sir Edward the feelings they experience are real (Sir Edward becomes "really interested for mother and son" [69]), but in Ethelinde's case they flow naturally from her own being, whereas for Sir Edward they are in explicit opposition to his spontaneous experience of emotion. The result of Sir Edward's deep acting, of course, is that he ends-up acting for the benefit of the heroine and her husband-to-be. The repression of emotion, therefore, would seem to be inferior to the staging of sensibility in managing the social economy.

In a similar vein, Sir Edward's romantic attraction to Ethelinde results in wilful self-delusion, revealing his relative inadequacies in managing emotions. This self-delusion is a persistent theme in the narrative, but perhaps most clearly demonstrated when Sir Edward separates from Lady Newenden. He arrives unexpected at Ethelinde's residence, stating that "'Lady Newenden is a worthless, a lost, an unprincipled woman'", that he has "'left... for ever'" (244). Sir Edward insinuates that Lady Newenden has committed adultery, but in fact this is not the case at this point in the story. Further, Sir Edward acknowledges that the separation will allow him to pursue something that "interests" (245) him: "to be the friend and protector" (245) of Ethelinde, clearly illustrating the real motive behind his decision to separate. Nevertheless, Sir Edward brushes aside Ethelinde's requests for specific details, and it is quite clear to the reader that through his hyperbolic language, insinuation, and refusal to state the plain facts of matter, Sir Edward seeks to delude himself about his motivations.

Hoschild argues that feeling "has a signal function; it warns us of where we stand vis-à-vis outer or inner events" (28). In a similar way to the senses, emotions enable people to interpret reality and to act accordingly. When Sir Edward determines to delude himself he attempts to artificially conjure up feelings of hatred towards Lady Newenden, feelings which have limited or no basis in actual events. As such, Sir Edward, through lying to himself, is deep acting. However, his emotional management in this case functions precisely to disable the signal function of feeling. Through deep acting, Sir Edward is able to misinterpret the event. Ethelinde's emotional strategies are not only, therefore, more successful in leveraging social profit, they also pose no threat to her ability to make sense of the world. Self-delusion, the mis-reading of reality, flies against the bourgeoisie ethos of self-control and prophesises danger for the woman foolish enough to become romantically involved with a man marked by such weakness. Seen through the lens of Hoschild's theory, it becomes clear that the control of emotions in *Ethelinde* is not necessarily valorised in the way Hoeveler argues is

symptomatic of the female gothic tradition. Rather, the careful staging of sensibility is seen as a proactive social force, uneasily aligned with both virtuous femininity on the one hand, and self-interest on the other, while the repression or summoning of emotions represents an inadequate male subjectivity.

It is through his deep acting that Sir Edward ultimately disqualifies himself as an appropriate companionate marriage partner for Ethelinde (or any properly gendered woman), within the logic of female authored gothic literature. Sir Edward's love for Ethelinde means he spends considerable sums of the money his wife, Lady Newenden, brought to the marriage on Ethelinde, violating the unwritten terms of the marriage contract. Similarly, Sir Edward withholds his affection from Lady Newenden and refuses her the role as his emotional confidante, instead resorting "for consolation to the mild and reasonable conversation of Ethelinde" (23). As a result, the marriage between Sir Edward and Lady Newenden is put under immense strain, and Lady Newenden repays Sir Edward by flirting with Lord Danesforte, ultimately driving Sir Edward to pursue a divorce. Finally, Lady Newenden commits adultery, but there is a strong sense that this is done more out of sheer desperation than anything else. In line with the conventions of the sentimental novel, the fallen Lady Newenden is purged from the narrative through a "sudden death" (482).

Seen thus, it becomes clear that Sir Edward cannot fulfil the role of companionate husband since he reveals himself capable of harming the lady under his protection. In part, it is exactly Sir Edward's ability to control his emotions, his ability to repress or conjure feelings, which make this so. Sir Edward's ability to deep act is of great service to Ethelinde, but it represents a significant threat to any woman joined to him in matrimony. If Ethelinde married Sir Edward, what is there to stop a second heroine subjecting Sir Edward to the same strategies of sensibility which Ethelinde has pursued with such success, and which resulted in the relinquishing of the duties of care to the woman under his protection?

Sir Edward, however, is nevertheless ultimately presented as a virtuous character. He expresses a strong desire to help Ethelinde, he refrains from offending her with a direct declaration of his love until his wife is dead and he (incorrectly) believes Montgomery is also dead, and he is explicitly contrasted with masculine libertines who seek to exploit rather than protect Ethelinde, as well as vulgar middle-class men characterised by the absence of sensibility. In these ways, Sir Edward demonstrates, in Hoeveler's terms, the "feminisation" of his identity, thus establishing his virtue.

The perception of Sir Edward's virtue is also strengthened by the corrupt feminine sensibility which marks his wife. Indeed, a casual reading of *Ethelinde* is likely to conclude that Lady Newenden deserves what she gets. She is presented throughout as being vain, selfish, and – most importantly – lacking in sensibility. For example, when Ethelinde falls into lake Grasmere, Lady Newenden "insisted upon fainting; but as nobody seemed disposed to attend her, she very prudently contented herself with the appearance of it only" (32). Lady Newenden is here precisely aligned with Kramer's superficial tricksters, women that mimic virtuous sensibility to manipulate others. As such, the transference of Sir Edward's affections (i.e., the transference of his financial and social protection) to Ethelinde is seen as entirely proper within the generic conventions of sensibility.

Because of Sir Edward's ostensible virtue, he cannot be purged from the plot as Lady Newenden is. Instead, Sir Edward is subsumed into the female-friendly world in spectacularly effective fashion. Despite his "heart being as partial as ever" (506) toward Ethelinde, he is cured of all the "painful sensations which had formerly attended that partiality" (506). He therefore accepts Ethelinde's marriage to Montgomery while spending much of his time at Grasmere where the married couple live, hoping that his son "might become the fortunate husband of the infant cherub whom he saw at... [Ethelinde's] breast" (507).

Inadequate as a companionate husband, Sir Edward's dangerous desire is transformed into a milder wish to offer support from a distance. Another way of saying this is that Sir Edward's desire has become feminised. We might even suggest that he has been symbolically castrated, his masculine sexual feelings (which lead to self-delusion and duelling, dangerous tendencies within the logic of sentimentality) thus neutralised. Bereft of masculine sexuality, Sir Edward has no wish to pursue a new romantic relationship, ensuring no other woman will suffer the consequences of his susceptibility to female sensibility, while his son guarantees the future protection of Ethelinde's own daughter. Within Ethelinde's reformed world, Sir Edward is permitted only to observe the domestic happiness of the object of his (desexualized) desire and offer support as required, apparently only too happy to do so.

Hoeverler points out that the female gothic novel, at times, paints a "cynical and sometimes self-critical portrait of what a woman has to do in to survive in patriarchy" (36). In *Ethelinde*, this undercurrent of cynicism becomes very strong, threatening to destabilize the conventions of sentimentality through which the text moves. By tacitly drawing attention to the manipulative feeling strategies of the heroine, and by representing feminine sensibility as complicit in the patriarchal victimization of another woman (Lady Newenden), Smith self-consciously critiques the genre and the female wish-fulfillment it enacts.

That Smith was a real and acute victim of patriarchal law has been well documented, and I think it is this personal narrative which fissures sensibility in the text so decisively.²⁰ Forced by a system of laws and conventions to present her sensibility publicly to ensure the survival of her family, in *Ethelinde* Smith seems at once to be advocating playing the victim, to be advocating the selling of sensibility, as well as expresses expressing a deep cynicism about it. She recognizes it as an effective strategy but, we can speculate, also feels the social injustice which makes such a strategy necessary, as well as alluding to the possible collateral damage the tactic might produce. Ultimately, however, Smith can offer no alternative method of agency for women in *Ethelinde*. Instead, she pushes the potential of female sensibility to its logical extreme in both directions. It is both harmonizing and destructive, sincere but manipulative, aligned with the private sphere yet structured by the logic of capitalist profiteering.

¹ Kaley Kramer, "Rethinking Surrender: Elizabeth Inchbald and the 'Catholic Novel,'" *British Literature in Context in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Teresa Barnard (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015) 87-105 (92).

² Kramer 92. See also Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 143.

³ Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 30.

⁴ Csengei 30.

⁵ Csengei 30.

⁶ For example, Adela Pinch, "Sentimentality and Experience in Charlotte Smith's Sonnets," *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) 51-71; Elizabeth A. Dolan, "Melancholia and the Poetics of Visibility: Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*," *Seeing Suffering in Women's Literature of the Romantic Era* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008) 21-47; Chris Jones, *Radical Sensibility: Literature and Ideas in the 1790s* (London: Routledge, 1993). Further references are to the same edition and given parenthetically in the text.

⁷ Claire Knowles, "Performing Sincere Sensibility: Charlotte Smith," *Sensibility and Female Poetic Tradition, 1780-1860* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Sarah M. Zimmerman, "Charlotte

Smith,” *Romanticism, Lyricism, and History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 199) 40-72.

⁸ Arlie Hoschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Further references are to the same edition and given parenthetically in the text.

⁹ Gillian Skinner, *Sensibility and Economics in the Novel, 1740-1800: The Price of a Tear* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); Harriet Guest, *Small Change: Women, Learning, Patriotism, 1750-1810* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). For both texts, further references are to the same editions and given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁰ Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998) 18. Further references are to the same edition and given parenthetically in the text.

¹¹ Ethelinde’s father dies because of his excessive sensibility. For a full account of the medical implications of sensibility in eighteenth century thought, see G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹² *Ethelinde* exemplifies a symptomatic plot of sentimentality/sensibility, identified by Janet Todd as the plot of the “benevolent and sensitive virgin”. This story dramatizes how an orphaned but virtuous heroine overcomes male libertinism or parental power to either be rewarded with marriage to the man she loves or else to die as a shining example of female virtue in distress. In *Ethelinde*’s case, she achieves the preferable ending in happy matrimony. See Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen & Co, 1986) 111-115. Further references are to the same edition and given parenthetically in the text.

¹³ For a full account of Smith’s use of an unreliable third-person narrator in *Ethelinde*, see Joseph Morrissey, “Sensibility and Good Health in Charlotte Smith’s *Ethelinde*,” *Picturing Women’s Health*, eds. Ji Wong Chung, Kate Scarth, and Francesca Scott (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014) 11-28.

¹⁴ Kramer 93.

¹⁵ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 12.

¹⁶ Zimmerman 41.

¹⁷ Zimmerman 70-71.

¹⁸ Zimmerman 71.

¹⁹ Jacqueline M. Labbe, “Metaphoricity and the Romance of Property in *The Old Manor House*,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 34.2 (2001): 216-231 (229).

²⁰ For discussion of Smith’s fraught personal life see Lorraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998). See also Jacqueline Labbe, “Introduction,” *The Old Manor House* (Ormskirk: Broadview, 2002) 9-29.